OSU merges departments to form first school of public health

By Jason Sherman
Lantern staff writer

Ohio State soon will become the home of Ohio's first School of Public Health from the merger of the Department of Preventative Medicine with the Division of Health Services Management and Policy.

The Board of Trustees approved the merger at its June meeting. Officials of both schools are currently meeting to discuss administrative details of the merger, which is expected to take effect July 1.

"The school will take up the College of Medicine) to the year 2000 and beyond and also will meet the state's needs," said Ronald St. Pierre, associate professor of Preventive Medicine.

The mission of the new school will be to improve and expand teaching programs, increase services to the community and generate more money for research, said Stephen Loeb, chairman and associate professor of Health Services Management and Policy.

Loeb's said the merger was not necessarily a money-saving move, but one that would consolidate the resources of the schools' programs and faculty.

"(The merger) is not likely to save money in the short run, but it will benefit the university by generating revenue by attracting research sources," Loeb's said.

"We look at this as a very exciting development in the state of Ohio. It will be a very important element in the practice of public health in Ohio," said Randall Harris, professor in chair, Department of Preventive Medicine.

Lisa Jones, a graduate research associate in the Department of Preventive Medicine, said the merger will benefit future students when looking for a job after graduation.

"It will be better to have a master's in Public Health, because with the master's in preventative medicine, you have to explain your degree," Jones said. She said that having a degree from a school of public health looks more professional to prospective employers.

The new school will include units in environmental health sciences, epidemiology and biometrics, biostatistics, behavioral sciences and health care policy.

Improvements to the teaching program will include an expanded master's program in public health. Loeb's stressed that this is not a new degree, but an expansion of a part-time program into a full-time program. He also said the doctorate degree in health options research would be expanded and improved.

"We have more than 100 doctorate and master's students; we hope to expand and maintain our high quality programs," Harris said.

Research in the new school will continue to focus on improving the health status of the general population and improving the effectiveness, quality and access to health care, Loeb's said.

Harris said that through expanded research, the new school of public health will be able to offer better health care services to the public.

In epidemiology, Harris said there has been a lot of success in the study of breast cancer and other diseases concerning women's health. He also said there is continued success in the study of carcinogens and the cancers they cause.

Loeb's said the new school would be more competitive for research funds and that ultimately will improve the status of health in the community.